

Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Photography and the Visual Representation of Sport

O'Mahony, Mike

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

O'Mahony, M. (2018). Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Photography and the Visual Representation of Sport. *Historical Social Research*, 43(2), 25-38. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.25-38>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more Information see:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Photography and the Visual Representation of Sport

Mike O'Mahony*

Abstract: »Wir sahen durch einen Spiegel in einem dunklen Bild: Überlegungen zur Fotografie und visuellen Darstellung von Sport«. The sport theme was immediately embraced by the earliest photographers. In its first part, this essay traces the long and influential history of sport photography from its beginnings through the motion studies of the late 19th century to the role of illustrated magazines in making sport photography widely available. Based on that outline, the essay then elaborates upon the relevance of photography for sport history, arguing that the uses of visual representations in sport history have been largely under-theorized. As examples, the essay then offers close readings of Life magazine features from the Cold War, discussing Ralph Crane's and Mark Kaufman's depictions of Soviet athletes during the 1952 and 1960 Olympic Games.

Keywords: Sport photography, illustrated magazines, visual studies, Olympic Games, Mark Kauffman, Cold War.

1. Introduction

On February 26, 1839 a horse named Lottery, ridden by Jem Mason, won the first official running of what would subsequently be dubbed the Grand National at Aintree racecourse.¹ The same year also witnessed the inaugural boating regatta at Henley-on-Thames and what was only the third staging of the University Boat Race.² This was also the year that Sussex, Britain's oldest County Cricket Club, came into being and that a former Rugby School pupil by the name of Albert Pell started to organise football games at Cambridge University. The so-called 'Cambridge Rules' would subsequently become the foundation for the rules established in 1863 by the newly formed Football Association (Taylor 2008, 24). It has also been claimed, though unproven, that 1839 saw the foundation of Barnes Rugby Football Club, thus making it the world's

* Mike O'Mahony, History of Art Dept, University of Bristol, 9 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TB, UK; Mike.OMahony@bristol.ac.uk.

¹ Earlier races, referred to as the Liverpool Grand Steeplechase, had been staged at Aintree between 1836 and 1838. See Pinfold (1998).

² Two previous races had been staged in 1829 and 1836, but the inter-collegiate competition only began to establish itself as an annual fixture from 1839. See Holt (1989, 108).

oldest club in any footballing code (Inverdale 2005). In a broader context, one might even add Charles Goodyear's 1839 'discovery' of vulcanized rubber, which would mark a significant contribution to the later production of balls for sports from baseball and basketball to golf and tennis (Slack 2002, 83). Thus as the fourth decade of the nineteenth century came to an end, sport was rapidly acquiring a significant presence and status in Britain. As sport was gradually exported around the globe, Britain's reputation as the birthplace of modern sport became firmly established. However, 1839 is more typically remembered for another significant development, namely the announcement by the French artist and physicist, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre of a new image making process (Frizot 1998). Within a few years this process, dubbed the Daguerreotype, was being widely disseminated throughout Europe and beyond, acting as the catalyst for the development and expansion of photography in the modern era.³ 1839 is thus considered the landmark year in photographic history.

It has, to date, been insufficiently acknowledged that the sport theme was immediately embraced by the earliest photographers. In the 1840s, for example, two of the pioneers of photography in Britain, David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson produced notable images representing both tennis players and golfers (Stevenson 2002, 88).⁴ The technical limitations of the time, specifically the need for exposures of several seconds, clearly restricted the possibility to represent sport in action and thus Hill and Adamson posed their sitters in what seem to modern viewers unnatural and artificial postures. However, within a relatively short period of time technical advances meant not only that sporting action could be captured on film, but also that the medium could reproduce viewpoints not previously available to close visual scrutiny. In the 1880s, for example, early experiments with high-speed photography conducted by both Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, extensively exploited sporting action as a means not only to test the limits of the technology, but also to develop knowledge of sporting movement (Braun 1992, 174). Thus, Muybridge's photographs famously resolved the 'unsupported transit' theory regarding racehorses at full gallop, whilst Marey's images of athletes in action, not least those captured at the Paris Olympic Games of 1900, not only generated scientific knowledge, but also provided an invaluable blue-print for sport training programmes (Braun 2010, 69; O'Mahony 2012, 39-42).⁵ Later, these early

³ Contrary to popular conceptions, this event did not proclaim the invention of the new medium of photography – Daguerre's colleague Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, the French-Brazilian Antoine Hercules Romuald Florence, and the Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot had all previously produced early examples of photographic imagery. See Frizot (1998).

⁴ Hill and Adamson's photograph of golfers also inspired Charles Lees's 1847 painting *The Golfers*. See Lewis and Howe (2004, 27-8). The image is available online at <<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/60622/mr-laing-or-laine.co.uk>> (Accessed April 9, 2018).

⁵ Marey was officially commissioned to produce chronophotographs of athletes during the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris. He specifically chose to represent the best performing American

experiments would also form the foundation for the development and widespread adoption of the photo-finish at races of all kinds, thus deploying photography as a key aid in making judgements of victory and defeat and diminishing antagonistic claims of sporting injustice.

As the possibility for the mass reproduction of photographs was developed towards the end of the nineteenth century, sport photography began to emerge as a new and significant genre in its own right, not least in response to an enthusiastic public's insatiable appetite for all forms of reporting on sporting activities. The expansion of local, national, and international sporting competitions in the twentieth century further bolstered this ever-expanding market, establishing a symbiotic relationship between live sporting action and its representation in the mass media. In this context, the specialist sport photographer gradually became an integral element within an ever-expanding sporting press. In Britain, photographs of sport increasingly played an important role in generalist journals such as the *Illustrated London News* as well as more specialist periodicals such as the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*. In mainland Europe, new sporting journals, such as *Sport im Bild* (Germany) and *La vie au grand air* (France) specialized in innovative photography and design layouts, and thus introduced and established some of the fundamental conventions within the presentation of sport photographs still deployed to this day (Gervais 2015, 131-8; see also Jäger 2018, in this issue).

Photography representing sport has also been exploited as a significant medium to document, expose, and critique social issues. Images of children playing football and cricket on the streets and in the slum areas of post-Second World War English cities, or basketball in the housing projects of urban America, have been widely deployed to signify, variously, social integration and exclusion whilst images of conventionally approved, and transgressive, behaviour amongst sport fans has fulfilled a similar role. More recently, the advent of affordable digital cameras and smartphones, aligned with the emergence of social media sites has begun to transform the visual landscape, allowing official and unofficial images of sporting events, from local park games to global Olympic festivals, to be circulated around the globe in seconds. The extent to which this more widespread ownership of sport imagery, and legal attempts by major corporations to resist this, might impact upon the ways that sport is conventionally presented in visual form is yet to be determined.

Despite this long and complex relationship between sporting practices and the medium of photography, sport photography, as a category in its own right,

can athletes including hurdler Alvin Kraenzlein, shot-putter Richard Sheldon, and high-jumper Mike Sweeney. These photographs, which accompanied a report produced by Marey and published in the Official Report of the Games, could subsequently be used as guides to train high-performance athletes. See *Concours internationaux* (1901, 384-404). See also O'Mahony (2012, 39-42).

has been largely ignored within academic study. As recently as 2011, for example, Lynda Nead claimed,

Sports photography has been completely overlooked in the history of photography. It is unclear why this has been the case, but perhaps it is to do with its everyday nature and its association with the world of leisure; its place on the back pages rather than the front pages of news reporting. If sports photographs are the subjects of exhibitions, as, for example, in the exhibition of photographs of boxer Muhammad Ali in London in 2010, it is usually because of the identity of their subjects, in which the nature of the image changes from sports photograph to portrait. (Nead 2011, 309)

Here Nead foregrounds how photographic representations of sport have broadly been seen as sitting rather awkwardly not only between identifiable disciplines, but also within wider cultural value systems. For example, the popularity of sport has resulted in it being regarded by many as insufficiently serious to warrant scholarly attention. And when its representation has entered the domain of institutions such as museums it has been largely appropriated through its association with other modes of practice seen as having sufficient cultural pedigree.

2. Why Do Photographs of Sport Matter?

Sport, as a cultural manifestation, might be regarded as primarily a visual experience. This is not to ignore the fact that, from both the participatory and spectatorial perspective, sport has its own sounds, smells, and even tastes. Nor is it to overlook the tactile dimension of sporting engagement. The skilful physical manipulation of specialist sports equipment or, in contact sports, the direct encounter with an opponent, highlight the more haptic nature of sporting experience. Rather it is to acknowledge that the specifically visual qualities of sport have marked a major contribution to its appeal, and not least its capacity to communicate so effectively across national and linguistic borders. Indeed, sport is one of the truly transnational cultural expressions of the modern era and it is this appeal that has facilitated the generation of a huge body of sporting evidence in visual form. Yet, whilst the material legacy of sport's visual culture provides an extensive and highly valuable resource for research, this has to date been largely untapped. Equally important, an engagement with the mediated products of visual culture has increasingly come not only to characterize the way in which we, as consumers, experience sport, but also to modify it. Today, even at live events, mediated imagery, in the form of programmes and advertisements, impacts upon our engagement with the sporting performance whilst the ubiquitous big screen, and increasingly the somewhat less monumental, but no less interventionist, personal smart-phone screen, have come to dominate our visual and conceptual field, offering alternative viewpoints, slow motion

replays and even mirror-images of ourselves as spectators. In this way, the visual culture that surrounds sporting action contributes towards shaping our very subjectivity and behaviour.

In one sense, visual representations have not so much been absent from historical analyses of sport, as under-theorized. Countless sport histories, recognizing sport's visual appeal, have included copious illustrations, most frequently in the form of photographs presented as notional testimony to affirm the story being recounted in text. Thus, as Doug Booth has pointed out,

Photographic portraits of players, athletes and administrators, and photographs of sporting equipment, uniforms, spectators, and settings for events and incidents, regularly appear in monographs as visual facts. (Booth 2005, 103)

Booth's intention, here, is to problematize this dominant convention, to highlight that visual 'evidence' should rather be regarded as contingent and mediated. Murray Phillips reinforces this view when he states that, "photographic representations are neither copies of the original text nor transparent replicas of reality nor accurate and unambiguous" (Phillips 2006, 12). Rather, he argues, readers engaging with such visual material need to adopt critical and analytical tools, much as would be applied for text or indeed any other form of evidence.

This call for a more critical approach to visual materials within the history of sport essentially stems from developments within other academic disciplines, not least those that foreground visual material, such as art history, film and media studies. Drawing upon W.J.T. Mitchell's insightful essays of the early 1990s, and the focus on developing methods for engaging with visual culture, as explored in the work of Gillian Rose and Peter Burke, this trend has been widely dubbed "the visual turn" (Mitchell 1994; Burke 2001; Rose 2007).⁶ Within sport history this might serve two key purposes; firstly, as a warning against the simplistic and unproblematic deployment of images as incontrovertible evidence of an uncontested history; and secondly to facilitate a more critical and analytical approach to the deployment of such material, enabling a more nuanced engagement with the visual and material culture of sport as a rich and valuable resource both to facilitate and to problematize explorations into sport's many pasts.⁷ When Marshall McLuhan first introduced his oft-quoted, enigmatic phrase "the medium is the message" in 1964, he was specifically drawing attention to the fact that it has often proven all too easy to underestimate the significance of the technological means through which ideas are communicated in modern society. More importantly, he highlighted how

⁶ Rose, in particular, has proposed "three criteria for a critical methodology" when engaging with visual materials, arguing, and I would suggest that this is in many senses self-evident, that images need to be: 1. taken seriously; 2. analyzed within the context of the social conditions and effects such artefacts have; and 3. engaged with self-reflexively. See (2007, 16-7).

⁷ For a more recent intervention offering an extensive exploration of the relationship between sport and visual culture see Huggins and O'Mahony (2012).

these means can subtly impact upon, even transform, the ideas themselves (McLuhan 1964). From the perspective of the visual turn in sport history this has much significance for an engagement not only with the ‘what’ of visual representation, but also with the ‘how.’ Thus in terms of the production of an image, analysis needs to consider what visual conventions, techniques, and devices are deployed, in what medium, and how these factors combine to contribute towards shaping (not determining) readings of the image. This analysis needs also to be extended beyond production factors to consider an image’s potential receptions according to where and how it is displayed, reproduced, and visually contextualized in both spatial and temporal terms.

But rather than simply argue that images engaging with sport ought to be taken more seriously, the images themselves should now take centre-stage. The second part of this article, will introduce a detailed analysis of specific examples of sports photography, both derived from the western popular media and relating to the representation of Soviet athletes during the early Cold War period. These brief case studies can demonstrate how a close engagement with photographs conventionally associated with the genre of sports photography can foreground the complexities and multi-referential potential of such visual material.

3. Reading Images: Representing the Soviet Female Athlete

In 1960, Mark Kauffman, a staff photographer for *Life* magazine, produced a number of images of sporting action at the Olympic Games in Rome. Amongst these is a photograph of the twenty-one-year-old Soviet athlete, Irina Press, competing in the 80-meter hurdles final.⁸ In terms of content alone – the ‘what’ of representation – this image might be read as a straightforward visual document recording a specific sporting moment, namely Press’s victory in this particular race at the Rome Olympics. But the ‘how’ is also vitally important here in communicating ideas beyond this simple factual information. For example, by adopting many of the conventions of contemporary sport photography, Kauffman not only documents this event, but also adds a specific sense of drama to his visual account, shaping, though not ultimately determining, the viewer’s engagement with it. At a basic level, the positioning of Press at the very centre of the image immediately elevates her status within the compositional structure, reinforcing the notion that the main focus of our attention should be on the ultimately victorious athlete. Moreover, by judiciously editing out most other competitors, the photograph effectively reconstructs the race as one between two Soviet athletes, with Galina Bystrova shown just inches be-

⁸ See online at <<https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/license/50559754>> (Accessed April 11, 2018).

hind her compatriot. The fact that Soviet and East European female athletes were a dominant force in world athletics at this time is thus reinforced through this composition. However, official records show that Bystrova finished only fifth out of six competitors, with British hurdler Carole Quinton securing the silver and Gisela Birkemeyer of West Germany the bronze. Thus, Kauffman's judicious editing and exclusive focus on the Soviet athletes might be construed as constructing a somewhat partial narrative, at least in terms of the final outcome of the race. The viewpoint adopted by Kauffman also contributes towards shaping the viewer's reading of the image. The low-angle, track-side position, up close to the action, emphasizes the privileged access of the professional sport photographer, one indeed that surpasses not only that of 'unofficial' photographers, but also of the stadium spectators themselves. This specialist viewpoint not only invokes a sense of authority, lending authenticity to the image, but also further determines that, in essence, the photograph is about the race and its outcome far more than an evocation of the wider event as a purely visual spectacle. This emphasis on visual conventions deployed in a manner to emphasize the potential result of sporting competitions has become so embedded in our visual consciousness that alternative modes of representation have a tendency to disturb or to fail to satisfy. A classic example of this can be seen in Leni Riefenstahl's infamous cinematic account of the Berlin Games of 1936, *Olympia* and the still photographs that derive from this source. When focusing on the gymnastic and diving events, Riefenstahl cared little for, and indeed studiously ignored, the outcome, dwelling instead on the aesthetic values of graceful, harmonious movement. Here, sport is translated, within the cinematic account of these events, into a physical choreography to be appreciated in its own terms, without recourse to competition or result. This aspect of Riefenstahl's film notably led Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht to speculate on the extent to which sporting performance itself might be conceived as aesthetic experience. Thus, Gumbrecht points out how "a dear friend and eminent art historian" once described how watching "Jesse Owens running during the final leg of the 400-meter sprint relay at the 1936 Olympics, as captured and preserved on Leni Riefenstahl's film, is as beautiful as Michelangelo's best sculptures." Whilst it may be tempting to concur with this appreciation of Owens' sporting performance, the key point here is the extent to which the aesthetic choices specifically made by Riefenstahl and her team contribute to that appreciation? Might the same event, viewed through a different set of aesthetic parameters serve less effectively to highlight this grace and beauty, or indeed, foreground an alternative set of values? Wisely, Gumbrecht concludes by keeping "the concept of the artwork separate from athletic performance as a candidate for aesthetic experience" (2006, 45-6). In the end it is perhaps this aspect of Riefenstahl's film that has allowed both spectators and commentators with relatively little concern for the competitive dimensions of sport to find interest in the aesthetic qualities of sporting performance, as articulated through the cinematic

medium, whilst those with more conventional sporting tastes have struggled to find satisfaction with this dimension of the project.

To return to Kauffman's image, it is also noteworthy that the photographer uses a relatively shallow depth of field, thus blurring the spectators in the background and ensuring that the viewer's attention is firmly focused on the athletes alone. The spectators, clearly, are of little interest to Kauffman. The fact that the image is captured on grainy, high-speed, black and white film also references the familiar conventions of news reportage photography, and thus even the specific medium deployed reinforces a sense of documentary authenticity to the image. Kauffman has also selected his moment carefully. By focusing on the latter stages of the race, his image foregrounds the extreme physical demands of the event, as Press's physique and physiognomy reveal the full strain and effort demanded of high-level sporting achievement. Even the slight tilt of the camera from the athletes' left to right serves to accentuate this physical effort, implying metaphorically an uphill struggle and, simultaneously, a sense of destabilized equilibrium and consciousness reflective of a moment of deep concentration, when the athlete might be described as 'in the zone.' All these compositional devices should not be considered accidental. Rather, they are reflective of a skilled practitioner fully aware not only of how to capture a dramatic moment on celluloid, but also how to facilitate specific interpretative possibilities, to suggest a constructed narrative, for the image. In this way, the photograph potentially communicates much more than a straightforward account of a given race won by a particular athlete. Rather, it elaborates the drama, emphasizing the effort and the significance of attainment expressed within Press's Olympic victory.

There is, however, another important aspect to reading this image that needs to be considered. Whilst Kauffman's craft in provoking potential interpretations may not be doubted, the probability that an audience will universally concur with this reading may well be. As has long been argued the personal experiences, interests, and ideological agendas of those viewing cultural products such as photographs, will likely generate disparate responses resulting, as Roland Barthes has argued, not so much in the death of the author as the birth of the reader, or in this case, the viewer (Barthes 1977). Whatever Kauffman's intentions in generating this image may have been, whatever narrative he may have sought to communicate, once this image, like any other constructed 'text,' entered the public domain it opened itself to as many alternative readings as there are readers. And it is the potential for this plurality of interpretative possibilities that also needs to be considered in any engagement with visual materials as evidence.

Here it may be helpful to cite just one example of how this particular image was subsequently redeployed to invoke a different reading to the one likely intended by the author. In September 1966, gender verification tests were conducted at an athletics event for the first time at the European Track and Field

Championships in Budapest. Later that year the International Olympic Committee announced that similar tests would be introduced at the Mexico City Games to be held two years later. In the United States, *Life* magazine responded to this development by publishing a now infamous and highly controversial article entitled “Are Girl Athletes Really Girls?”⁹ Significantly, Kauffman’s photograph of Irina Press, taken six years earlier, was included alongside photographs of her sister, shot-putter Tamara, and Soviet long-jumper Tatyana Shchelkanova, none of whom had appeared at the Budapest event. The accompanying headline, “Three muscular stars from Russia elected to stay at home...” was clearly designed to prompt suspicions concerning the gender identity of these athletes.¹⁰ This objective was further reinforced by the accompanying text describing Irina and her sister as “known to their competitors as ‘the Press brothers.’”¹¹ Whilst this story is reasonably well known, it is the redeployment of Kauffman’s image that is of particular significance here. In the article, the original photograph was cropped to isolate Press from her fellow competitor. More importantly, it was also juxtaposed on the page with a strikingly different photograph of British athlete Mary Rand, represented wearing a national athletics costume while passively standing by a river and holding aloft her four-year-old daughter. This bucolic scene, with church in the background, thus establishes a very different vision of individuality and femininity from that of the Soviet and East German athletes. Edited, and placed in this new, and heavily loaded, context the physical effort etched on Press’s face now foregrounds an alternative possible interpretation, one in which these marks of physical endurance imply not so much athletic commitment, as ambiguous gender identity, especially when contrasted with the dominant western stereotypical notion of a passive, maternal femininity epitomized in the demure image of Rand. Here the potential significance of Kauffman’s original photograph is transformed by its redeployment in this new context. As claims that Soviet and Eastern European women might not actually be women were voiced, though significantly unproven, visual materials such as Kauffman’s photograph of Irina Press in full flight were redeployed in the west as implied ‘evidence’ of wrongdoing and deviancy amongst the ideological enemy in the Cold War.¹² And here, it might be added, this Cold War political deployment of Kauffman’s photograph could be said to have already had history.

⁹ “Are Girls Athletes Really Girls?”, *Life Magazine*, 7 October 1966, 63–6; the issue is online available at <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=jFYAAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false> (Accessed April 11, 2018).

¹⁰ “Are Girls Athletes Really Girls?”, 66.

¹¹ “Are Girls Athletes Really Girls?”, 66.

¹² See also Wiederkehr (2011).

4. Meeting the Enemy

In July 1952, a contingent of over 700 athletes, trainers, and officials from the Soviet Union arrived in Helsinki to take part for the first time in the summer Olympic Games.¹³ It was abundantly clear that Soviet athletes were not there simply to make up the numbers, as its athletes secured a total of 71 medals (22 golds, 30 silvers, and 19 bronzes). Only the United States accrued more medals winning a total of 76 (40 golds, 19 silvers, and 17 bronzes). From this point on, the Olympic Games would become one of the primary arenas in which the two post-war super-powers would wage battle for political and ideological supremacy. The participation of the Soviet Union at the Helsinki Games certainly upped the Cold War ante as far as the international media were concerned, making this Olympic festival one of the most widely reported to date. For the first time the Games were described as a “battle of the giants” with competition between US and Soviet athletes dominating virtually all other concerns. For the western press, however, the presence of the Soviet team also posed more fundamental questions. What, for example, were the Soviet athletes actually like? How different were they to western athletes and what effect had isolation from international sport had upon them? Were they really, as had been claimed, simply the product of an inhuman Soviet sports machine that was beginning to churn out high-performance athletes much as Soviet industry was fulfilling production demands for pig iron and steel? Or was this new, post-war generation more amenable to western influence? Over the next few decades, competition between the ideologies of the communist and capitalist nations would take place on the playing fields of the Olympic Games. Photographs published in the mass media would also provide an arena in which this ideological battle could be engaged. Here, a brief analysis of the various ways in which Soviet Olympic athletes were represented in the American press may offer some insights into the impact of Cold War thinking on the visual culture of the Games.

During the Helsinki Games, athletes and officials from the major participating nations were housed in the official Olympic village at Käpylä, less than a mile and a half from the main competition venues. Soviet athletes, as well as those from the eastern European nations politically aligned with the Soviet Union (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania), took up alternative residence in temporary university accommodation at Otaniemi in the countryside surrounding the city. This consciously implemented isolation was widely criticized by the western media who immediately dubbed the site “The Little Iron Curtain” village. Possibly in response to this, the Soviet au-

¹³ The former Tsarist Empire had sent teams of sportsmen to both the London (1908) and Stockholm (1912) Games, picking up a handful of medals in figure skating, Greco-Roman wrestling, and shooting events.

thorities altered their isolationist strategy and took steps towards encouraging, even celebrating, interactions between its athletes and those from the west. Interaction between US and Soviet athletes both on and off the field of play now rapidly became a characteristic feature of the Helsinki Games and one that was widely reported, especially amongst the photo-journalistic fraternity.

One of the better-known reporters present in Helsinki was Ralph (Rudy) Crane, a staff photographer for *Life* magazine. Unlike many of his colleagues at the Games, Crane was not primarily a sports photographer. His reputation lay in the photo-story, weaving simple narratives around a series of candid, seemingly unposed, shots that notionally captured the essence of a given moment or event. Whilst in Helsinki, although Crane did take some shots at the stadium and other competition arenas, he predominantly photographed athletes during their free time, gathering at canteens or chatting with each other at their respective Olympic bases. Clearly his primary objective was to capture images of US and Soviet athletes interacting together. At first glance, many of these images might be seen as exemplifying a mood of détente, providing incontrovertible evidence of the capacity of sport, and the Olympic Games in particular, to break down barriers and facilitate friendly dialogue between individuals whose nationalities have, as an accident of history, constructed them as enemies. Here, the idea that sport enables communication across a political, ideological, and frequently linguistic, divide is seemingly celebrated and the oppositional stance of wider Cold War politics might seem thus to be undermined. Closer scrutiny of these works, however, can also suggest an underlying agenda that reinforces, rather than challenges, many of the Cold War anxieties and clichés inevitably generated by this friendly meeting of ideological enemies in the hotbed of Olympic competition.

A particularly striking example of this is a photograph by Crane representing four male athletes, two from the United States and two from the Soviet Union, seated on a bench beneath trees in the Olympic Village.¹⁴ Here, whilst open dialogue is clearly taking place, it is notable that it is the more relaxed American sportsman who leads the conversation whilst the two Soviet athletes lean forward, listening intently, and seemingly hanging on to his every word. The figure on the far right is so keen to be a part of this group that he perches, precariously, on the edge of the bench in what must be a most uncomfortable position. In contrast, the American athlete on the far left, occupies considerable space on the bench, but shows no willingness to adjust his position despite the obvious marginalization of his compositional counterpart. Though attached to the group, he seems far more reluctant to participate in this dialogue. Instead he stares down at his hands, physically and emotionally distancing himself from the Soviet athletes whom, it might be presumed, he regards as a little too close

¹⁴ Available online at <<https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/american-and-russian-olympic-athletes-sitting-on-bench-and-news-photo/50532670>> (Accessed April 11, 2018).

for comfort. The somewhat unconventional framing of this image is also striking. Confined in the lower left of the composition, the American athletes seem crowded, obliged physically to defend their space. The verticality and outstretched left leg of the more centrally positioned American athlete here provides a clear physical buffer against the more dynamic lean of a metaphorical Soviet advance guard emerging from a birch forest. This image thus implies a very particular relationship between east and west. The American athletes, individuals to the core, express either engaged superiority or disengaged reluctance to communicate with their Soviet counterparts. The latter, on the other hand, show an unflagging fascination for the Americans, adding nothing to the discussion but eagerly consuming the notional wisdom of the west. But, does this signify a desire to embrace American ideals or slowly to encroach into the enemy's camp? Are these athletes symbolic of potential defectors or conniving invaders? Certainly both characteristics were the staple of western stereotyping of Soviet citizens at this time. Here it is the very ambiguity of Crane's work that lends it such an evocative Cold War sensibility.

5. Conclusion

This brief examination of specific examples of sports photography hopefully serves as a demonstration of the mutability of the image, of the capacity of photographs of sport to convey ideas that extend far beyond the more conventionally presumed (not least amongst sport historians in the past) documentary nature of the medium, and that lend themselves to multiple and ever-changing interpretation. Up to this point, no mention has been made of the somewhat enigmatic title of this article. The source of the phrase, "through a glass darkly" is biblical, quoted by Paul in *Corinthians*, when he declares, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Here Paul uses the metaphor of poor reflection, in "a glass darkly" (early mirrors, manufactured from polished metal, were renowned for their poor reflective qualities) to contrast unreliable earthly vision with the idealised, clear, stable and heavenly image of God that will be generated in the afterlife. What should have become evident by now is that while photographic images of sport, and the various modes of their cultural deployment, need to be taken seriously as important material traces of both sport's, and society's, history, they also need to be analysed carefully and in detail, considered less as stable signifiers of uncontested truths, than as the insubstantial and murky reflections that inspired this original biblical quotation. It is from this perspective that the strengths, limitations, and individual qualities of photographs of sport need to be assessed in order to suggest the multiple ways that such material can simultaneously prove meaningful and problematic as research resources for sport history.

References

- Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image-Music-Text*. London: Fontana.
- Booth, Douglas. 2005. *The Field: Truth and Fiction in Sport History*. London: Routledge.
- Braun, Marta. 1992. *Picturing Time: The Work of Étienne-Jules Marey*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Braun, Marta. 2010. *Eadweard Muybridge*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Burke, Peter. 2001. *Eyewitnessing: The Use of Images as Historical Evidence*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Concours internationaux. 1901. *D'exercices physiques et de sports* (Official Report of the Olympic Games of Paris, 1900). Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.
- Frizot, Michel. 1998. *A New History of Photography*. London: Könemann.
- Gervais, Thierry. 2015. Illustrating Sports, or the Invention of the Magazine. In *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News*, ed. Jason E. Hill and Vanessa R. Schwartz, 131-8. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. 2006. *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Holt, Richard. 1989. *Sport and the British: A Modern History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Huggins, Mike, and Mike O'Mahony. 2012. *The Visual in Sport*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Inverdale, John. 2005. My assumptions about 'oldest' were confounded by Barnes. *The Telegraph*, November 2. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/rugbyunion/2367614/My-assumptions-about-oldest-were-confounded-by-Barnes.html>> (Accessed March 1, 2017).
- Jäger, Jens. 2018. A Fist on the Cover. Some Remarks on Visual Sources in Sports History. *Historical Social Research* 43 (2): 39-52. doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.39-52](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.39-52).
- Lewis, Peter N., and Angela D. Howe. 2004. *The Golfers: The Story Behind the Painting*. Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. 1994. *Picture Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nead, Lynda. 2011. Stilling the Punch: Boxing, Violence and the Photographic Image. *Journal of Visual Culture* 10 (3): 309.
- O'Mahony, Mike. 2012. *Olympic Visions: Images of the Games through History*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd.
- Phillips, Murray G. 2006. *Deconstructing Sport History: A Postmodern Analysis*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Pinfold, John. 1998. Where the Champion Horses Run: The Origins of Aintree Racecourse and the Grand National. *International Journal of the History of Sport* 15 (2): 137-51.
- Rose, Gillian. 2007. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. London: Sage Publishing.

- Slack, Charles. 2002. *Noble Obsession: Charles Goodyear, Thomas Hancock, and the Race to Unlock the Greatest Industrial Secret of the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Texere Publishing.
- Stevenson, Sara. 2002. *Facing the Light: The Photography of Hill and Adamson*. Edinburgh: Scottish National Portrait Gallery.
- Taylor, Matthew. 2008. *The Association Game: A History of British Football*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Wiederkehr, Stefan. 2011. "... if Jarmila Kratochvilova is the future of women's sport, I'm not sure I'm ready for it": Media, Gender and the Cold War. In *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer, Sandra Budy, Alexandra Köhring and Manfred Zeller, 315-35. Frankfurt a. M.: Campus.

Historical Social Research

Historische Sozialforschung

All articles published in HSR Special Issue 43 (2018) 2: Visualities – Sports, Bodies, and Visual Sources.

Jörn Eiben & Olaf Stieglitz

Depicting Sporting Bodies – Visual Sources in the Writing of Sport History. An Introduction.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.7-24](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.7-24)

Mike O'Mahony

Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Photography and the Visual Representation of Sport.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.25-38](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.25-38)

Jens Jäger

A Fist on the Cover. Some Remarks on Visual Sources in Sports History.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.39-52](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.39-52)

Markus Stauff

The Assertive Image: Referentiality and Reflexivity in Sports Photography.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.53-71](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.53-71)

Michael Krüger

Visual Sources in the History of Sports: Potential, Problems, and Perspectives with Selected Examples of Sporting Art.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.72-92](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.72-92)

Bernhard Hachleitner & Sema Colpan

The *Wunderteam*, Painted in Oil: Insights of Images / Insights through Images in Sport Studies.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.93-108](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.93-108)

Kasia Boddy

American Girl: The Iconographies of Helen Wills.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.109-128](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.109-128)

Matthias Marschik

Depicting Hakoah. Images of a Zionist Sports Club in Interwar Vienna.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.129-147](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.129-147)

Melanie Woitas

"Exercise Teaches You the Pleasure of Discipline" – The Female Body in Jane Fonda's Aerobics Videos.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.148-164](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.148-164)

Barbara Englert

The Hollywood Sports Film – Visualizing Hidden and Familiar Aspects of American Culture.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.165-180](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.165-180)

Eva Maria Gajek

More than Munich 1972. Media, Emotions, and the Body in TV Broadcast of the 20th Summer Olympics.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.181-202](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.181-202)

Markus Stauff

The Pregnant-Moment Photograph:

The 1908 London Marathon and the Cross-Media Evaluation of Sport Performances.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.203-219](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.203-219)

Amanda Shuman

No Longer 'Sick': Visualizing 'Victorious' Athletes in 1950s Chinese Films.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.220-250](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.220-250)